MAN'S PROJECTS AND GOD'S RESULTS.

A SERMON:

PREACHED BY THE

Rev. P. D. GURLEY, D. D.,

ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 1863,

BEING THE

DAY OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING, PRAISE AND PRAYER.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
WM. BALLANTYNE,
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CORRESPONDENCE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., August 10, 1863.

REV. P. D. GURLEY, D. D.,
Pastor New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.

DEAR SIR:

The undersigned enjoyed the privilege of listening, on Thanksgiving Day, August 6th, 1663, to your Sermon, on that occasion, and believing that its publication will call attention of the Christian, as also the Patriot, to a truer sense of obligation and duty to God and their Country, in the present struggle against disorder and rebellion than has yet been felt, we therefore respectfully, but earnestly ask a copy for publication.

Although no formal meeting of the auditory on that occasion has taken place, with a view to this request, we feel assured that we give the unanimous opinion and wish of the congregation who listened to the discourse.

Respectfully and truly, your obedient servants,

J. E. BRADY,
WM. G. PARKHURST,
JOSEPH HENRY,
Z. W. DENHAM,
WM. BALLANTYNE,
M. P. SMITH,
JAS. WHITEHILL,
E. W. FORREST.

WASHINGTON, D. C., August 13, 1863.

To Messrs. BRADY, HENRY, WHITEHILL, DENHAM, FORREST, BALLANTYNE, PARKHURST, AND SMITH.

GENTLEMEN:

Your note, requesting a copy of my Thanksgiving Sermon for publication, is before me. In deference to your united and earnestly expressed judgment and wishes, I will, in a few days, comply with your request. Should this Sermon have the effect of leading those who read it, to a clearer recognition of the hand of God in our national troubles, and to a firmer confidence in Him as the Guardian-God of the nation, who chastens that He may purify and save us, then my strongest and best hope, in consenting to its publication, will be realized.

Yours truly,

P. D. GURLEY,
Pastor of the N. Y. Avenue Pres. Church.

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SERMON.

MAN'S PROJECTS AND GOD'S RESULTS.

INTRODUCTION.

The Sermon I am about to preach I have entitled Man's Projects and God's Results. It shows the stand-point from which I have been accustomed to look at our national troubles, and what I have believed, and still believe, will be the final outcome and issue of those troubles. I am not a politician, in the popular sense of the word; I never have been: I never expect to be. I presume I never *ought* to be. When, therefore, I speak of our national affairs, either in the pulpit or out of it, I speak, not as a political partisan, but as a believer in the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and as an humble interpreter of his word and providence. I believe this Triune God is in history; I believe He is in *all* history: I believe His hand and His mercy are exceedingly conspicuous in our own national history; and never more so than in the present eventful and perilous crisis: and my confident hope is, that, when the crisis is over, and the Divine purpose in permitting it is fully developed and accomplished, the nations who now *predict*, if they do not *desire*, our ruin, will be compelled to say: "the Lord hath done great things for them;" and our simple yet grateful response will be: "the Lord *hath* done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

My text to-day is

PROVERBS XVI: 9.

"A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps."

Man is a rational, a free, and, therefore, an accountable moral agent. He acts from choice, and not by constraint. His *heart* deviseth his way. This is real freedom. It is a freedom, of which every man is conscious, and with which every man is satisfied. It is the basis of responsibility. Its existence is clearly asserted in the Bible; it is distinctly recognized in all its various teachings,—in its preceptive requirements, in its tender appeals, in its words of warning, and in the penal sanctions with which it enforces the claims of duty.

But while this is true, it is also true that God governs the world: by which we mean that He governs not merely the world of matter, but the world of mind, "all his creatures and all their actions." His Kingdom ruleth over all. He sits upon the throne of universal empire, and does "according to His will in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." Whatever becomes of *their* projects, His counsel stands, and He does all His pleasure. Nay more: He accomplishes His fixed and eternal purpose through the instrumentality of free, and accountable, and even *wicked* agents. He does it too, without impairing their freedom or their accountability. *How* He does it we can not explain; nor need we. It is enough for us to know these facts:—first, that man is free; and secondly, that God governs the world without infringing man's freedom. Whether we can reconcile these facts or not, is a matter of no importance. We know they are reconcilable, because we know they are true. We know from the united testimony of consciousness and revelation that they are facts; and it is also evident that they are precisely *the* facts which are asserted in our text: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth

his steps." Man devises; the Lord directs. Man *pro*poses; God *dis*poses. Man thinks, consults, plans, acts, and all freely; God controls, limits, orders, overrules, according to the good pleasure of His own holy will, and for the advancement of His own declarative glory. Or, in the language of a passage parallel to the text, "There are many devices in a man's heart: nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Man's agency, and God's overruling sovereignty; man's heart devising his way, and the Lord directing his steps; or, in other words, Man's *schemes*, and God's *issues*, Man's *projects*, and God's *results*:—this is the subject we have selected for this occasion, and which we shall now endeavor to illustrate and improve, having a becoming regard in the whole discussion to the condition of our beloved country, and to the probable fruits and consequences of the terrible struggle in which, as a nation, we have been engaged for more than two years, and in which we *may* still be engaged for an equal, if not a longer, time to come.

And 1. In the first place, I ask you to look at *the first great project of human ambition of which we have any account in history*. The waters of the flood have subsided and passed away. The world is re-peopled; and the whole earth is of one language and of one speech. The inhabitants thereof, as they journey from the East, form the design of making for themselves an illustrious name, and also of founding a universal monarchy to which all the people of the earth shall be in subjection. This design is expressed in the words, "Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto Heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." To centralize power; to consolidate a government which shall control the world; to establish a universal depotism that shall suppress the true religion, and foster falsehood and crime,—one great seat of influence and authority, around which all men shall gather, and before which all men shall bow:—this is their object, and they spare no expenditure of zeal or labor

in the effort to accomplish it. But how sudden and overwhelming is their defeat! And why? Because He who sits in the heavens is against them. It is His pleasure that men shall be scattered abroad, and divided into different nations. He speaks, and their language is confounded, their work ceases, their project fails; and the very result they had feared, and aimed to prevent, is forced upon them by a necessity they can neither escape nor resist. *Their* object was one thing; *God's* purpose was another. To lift a tower to the heavens, to build a mighty city, to erect themselves into an empire which should sweep and sway the world:—this was their project:—but, on the other hand, to confound their language, to reprobate their ambition, to turn their Heaven-daring counsels into foolishness, and to send them over the earth in divided clans; which clans should be the beginning and the source of many different nations and many varying forms of government;—this was God's result.—Surely, with such a history before us, we can not fail to see and to feel how true it is, that "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." No doubt, those Babel-builders felt strong in the beginning of their enterprise; they were also united; perhaps they were honest; perhaps they verily thought they were doing a great thing for the cause of humanity and good government; and, it may be, they were very confident of success; but there was just one consideration which stamped their scheme with folly as well as wickedness, and made its defeat as certain as destiny itself. *It was antagonistic to the plan and purpose of God.* True, their hearts devised it with ardor, and their hands pursued it with vigor; but success was out of the question, because it was not in harmony with the mind of Him who governs the world, and who directed the issue, as He directs all issues, not according to the drift of man's devices, but according to the promptings of His own unerring wisdom, and the tenor of His own eternal "purpose according to the counsel of His will."

2. Again—Look at *the history of Joseph and his brethren.*

Joseph is the favorite child of his father. His brethren see it, and are filled with enmity against him. This enmity increases from day to day, till at last they conspire to take his life. Through the interposition of Reuben his life is spared, and through the counsel of Judah he is sold to a company of Ishmaelites who carry him into Egypt. This is the simple history of the feelings and the conduct of Joseph's brethren. They envy him: they hate him: it is in their hearts to kill him: at length they sell him for twenty pieces of silver, and report to his father that an evil beast has devoured him. This was their device and their work, and an awfully wicked device and work it was. But what was God's design in permitting it? Let the inspired history answer. Joseph is sold a second time to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh: in a few years, by a wonderful connection and combination of providences, he becomes viceroy of the whole land of Egypt: at his suggestion, and through his instrumentality, corn is gathered and laid up in store against a time of famine: that time arrives: the distress occasioned by it is great, not only in Egypt, but in all surrounding countries: at length Jacob, with his children and his children's children, goes down into Egypt to reside: through Joseph's instrumentality they obtain the best of the land for a possession: in a century or two their posterity becomes a great nation: and *that nation is the Church of God:* yes, *the Church of God*, with whose history are associated the birth and the mission of Moses, the plagues of Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, the giving of the law at Sinai, the falling of manna from heaven, the pillar of cloud and of fire, and all those wonderful events which mark the progress of the Jewish nation for more than a thousand years, give to the glory of Jehovah some of its brightest illustrations, and constitute the subject of a very considerable portion of those Divinely inspired Scriptures which we have in our hands, and which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Joseph's brethren simply designed to gratify their wicked passions: to put Joseph out

of the way :—this was their project :—but what was the purpose of Him whose throne is in the heavens? To preserve a seed to serve Him, and to become the keepers of his truth and of a pure religious worship : to raise up a people for his own glory, and train them in the school of affliction, and lead them through the sea and through the wilderness with signs and wonders never to be forgotten: to give *to* them, and *through* them, to their posterity, a Divine Revelation which should be a lamp to the feet and a light to the path of his saints in every age:—this was God's result. How little did those envious brethren know, when they closed that cruel and infamous bargain with the Ishmaelites, what they were doing, or rather, what God was doing through them. *They* were moved by envy : *He*, by love. *They* had one purpose : *He*, another : *They* meant it for evil : *He*, for good. *They* aimed to destroy life : *He*, to save it. *They* devised their way, formed their plan, executed it: and, wicked as it was, *God* made it the first link in a chain of events which preserved the church from extinction, and furnished materials for a history teeming with the richest exhibitions of His glory and His grace.

3. Again—Look at *the history of our Saviour's crucifixion.* A Jewish mob, scribes, and chief priests, and elders of the people, filled with prejudice and rage, are determined to take the life and thereby crush the cause of the despised Nazarine. In Judas, one of His own disciples, they find an instrument suited to their purpose. For thirty pieces of silver he betrays Him into their hands. They hurry Him through a mock trial, suborn witnesses to testify against Him, and pronounce Him worthy of death. They clamor for his crucifixion, and when the Roman Governor finally yields to their importunity, straightway they lead Him to a place called Gethsemane. And "there they crucified Him." See Him now as He hangs on the cursed tree. He is a disfigured and a bleeding corpse. His enemies have accomplished their purpose: their plan has reached its consummation : their malice is gratified. But what have they done?

Ah, what *have* they done? Wicked instruments, under the sway of passions set on fire of hell, they have unwittingly fulfilled the predictions of prophecy—the predictions of their own Holy Scriptures—and accomplished an event more fruitful in blessings for a guilty race, than any other ever was or ever shall be. True indeed, they were murderers in heart and in fact, murderers of the Prince of life, and, in the whole transaction, they were influenced by motives as dark and dreadful as the pit: true indeed, it was not their intention to fulfil the predictions of prophecy: yet they did fulfil them. It was not their intention to show that Jesus was the true Messiah by filling up the picture which Isaiah and other Old Testament Prophets had drawn embracing the minute particulars which should attend His death: yet these very particulars they did furnish, and all in confirmation of his claims. It was not their intention to execute the "determinate counsel" of God respecting an event more momentous in its influence upon the immortal destinies of men, than any other in the annals of the universe; and yet they did execute it, and that two with "wicked hands." To gratify a hellish thirst for blood: to wreak their vengeance upon one who had exposed their hypocrisy and told them the truth: to crush His existence, His claims, and the prospects of his followers by a single blow:—this was their object: and, when the last nail had been driven into that cross, they thought they had accomplished it: but how were they mistaken, and how different was God's purpose from theirs! To lay upon the altar of Divine justice a sacrifice which should atone for sin, and open a door of hope to a lost and guilty world: to prepare the way for lifting uncounted millions from the woes of the second death, and making them the heirs of glory: to spoil the principalities and powers of darkness, and people the realms of light with ransomed sinners washed in atoning blood: to make an exhibition of blended justice and mercy which should attract the gaze of the universe, shed new lustre upon the Divine character, and furnish a theme for gratitude and praise in

Heaven, which should be forever enrapturing and forever new :—this was God's purpose : this was the result at which He aimed : the result He actually accomplished to the praise of the glory of His grace. In all this transaction, so interesting and memorable, how clearly and fully does the truth of our text appear, that though "*a man's heart deviseth his way, yet the Lord directeth his steps.*" Man plans and acts freely, and, it may be, wickedly, but God, by an all-pervading and a mysterious agency, so directs and limits his actions, that they shall subserve His own holy purposes, and so shapes and controls the issues thereof, that they shall redound to the furtherance of His kingdom and glory.

4. And now, leaving these Scriptural illustrations, let us look, for a moment, into the records of a more recent history, and see how impressively that also will teach us, that, while "man's heart deviseth his way, the Lord directeth his steps." Why is it that the British are masters to-day of so great a portion of India ? How came they there ? I answer, commerce, the splendid commerce of which India has always been the theatre, originally induced them to seek a footing on its "coral strand." At first they built factories along the coast and fortified them to protect themselves against the violence and extortion of the natives. This step soon led to *territorial* acquisitions : and the history of those acquisitions has been written in blood from the days of Hyder Ali down to the present moment. War has followed war, and one victory after another has been achieved, at a fearful sacrifice of life, till now almost the entire country is under British domination. Wealth, commerce, power,—these are the motives which have urged the English onward from the beginning : these are the rewards for the attainment of which they have encountered and overcome the most formidable difficulties, and shed their blood upon a thousand fields of conflict and of death. But what has been *God's* purpose in permitting that immense country to become subject to their sway ? Ah, that is a very different question. *His* purpose is just beginning to appear, and the

wondering nations of Christendom are just beginning to comprehend it. You see it in the protection afforded by British arms to our missionaries and missionary stations. You see it in the large and promising fields they have opened from year to year, and some quite recently, for missionary labor. You see it in the probability, which is becoming stronger every year, that the introduction of European science, and customs, and arts, and civilization into India through the agency of British enterprise and power, is destined to shake its long-established systems of idolatry to their very centres and foundations, and prepare the way for Christianity to reach, and enlighten, and elevate, and bless, and save its vast and degraded population. Let it be admitted that the history of all the British have done there is stamped with the impress of cupidity, usurpation, and blood: let it be admitted that their motives have been basely selfish, and their measures worthy of universal reprobation:—still God is manifestly overruling their movements there for the production of the most desirable and glorious results—results which will hasten the latter day glory of Zion and the universal reign of righteousnes and peace. Surely no one, at the present day, can intelligently contemplate the subject of British sway in India, in all its past history and present aspects and bearings, without seeing new force and significancy in the words of our text, "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." Man lays his plans and prosecutes them with energy, perhaps under the influence of the basest passions; but God orders the issue for his own glory:—for the furtherance of the gospel and the salvation of a dying world. It is the security of this world, and of all worlds, that such a good, and wise, and wonder-working God is on the throne of the universe. Otherwise, what issues of darkness, and terror, and ruin, would not the madness of men and devils bring to pass!

Illustrations similar to those already presented, and to the same purpose, might be greatly multiplied. It would be easy, for example, to show that God has overruled the slave

trade, despite of its horrors, and slavery, despite of its evils, for the good of Africa; by sending back to its benighted shores the descendants of those once taken thence in chains; sending them back, with the lamp of life in their hands, and the grace of life in their hearts, to kindle there, in the midst of prevailing darkness, the lights of science, civilization, liberty, and true religion. Who of us, indeed, as we look upon the colonies of Liberia, remember from whence they sprung, and see in them the last and best hope of the degraded millions around them, can forbear to exclaim in the language of an inspired Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways past finding out!" It is, however, unnecessary to say more in the way of illustration. The truth announced in the text is, I trust, plain: you see it: you understand it. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." Man acts freely; he may act wickedly, and with the very worst designs;—but God orders the result; brings light out of man's darkness, order out of his confusion, causing even his wrath to praise Him, while the remainder of wrath He restrains. This is the great truth which we have deemed it appropriate to set before you to-day; because it is in the view of this truth, and under its influence, that we are led to believe and to say with confidence: *There is hope for our bleeding country.* He who confounded the language and defeated the ambitious designs of the builders of Babel, can confound the counsels and defeat the designs of those who would divide and thereby ruin this nation. He, who provided sustenance and redemption for His people by the sale of Joseph into Egypt, can provide deliverance for us by methods equally mysterious, and yet equally effective. He, who made the crucifixion of Jesus by wicked hands the most glorious event in the annals of the universe, can turn the dark night of our national adversity into a morning of gladness and a day of splendor such as neither this nor any other nation has ever seen before. He, who, by British avarice and arms, has prepared

the way of the Lord in India, can, even by rebellion and civil war, prepare for us, and prepare us for, a high and splendid destiny. He, who is overruling slavery for the good of Africa, can overrule the infatuation both of the enemies and the friends of slavery for the purification of the country by blood, and its consequent rescue from ruin. We must not be faithless, but believing. God is on the throne, our fathers' God and our God. He has ever been manifestly and marvellously the Guardian-God of this Republic. And, though we have offended Him, we can not believe He will leave us to perish. He may chastise, but He will not destroy us; He may purify, but He will not consume us. At least, this is our abiding hope and confidence, and has been ever since our beloved land first felt the scourge of this dreadful and bloody strife. We have regarded it as discipline, and not destruction;—a fearful discipline to be sure, but merited, needed, and destined in the end so to purge away our sins, that we shall become, in a fuller, loftier sense than ever before, that united and happy people, whose God is the Lord. It would certainly be very much in keeping with what we have seen in this discourse, and learned from a thousand other sources, of God's wonderful works and ways in our world, if He should, sooner or later, so shape events and opinions, and so direct their course in this country, that the very efforts which have been made to divide us, should lead to "a more perfect union;" that the very scheme which was formed to perpetuate and extend slavery, should issue in its overthrow; that the very ravings of fools and fanatics should bring the generality of the people to calm reflection and just conclusions; that the very devices of treason should develop and extend a style of patriotism which nothing can corrupt, or turn away from its purpose of saving an imperiled country; and that the very struggle in which we are engaged, the costly, costly struggle to preserve our nationality, should finally terminate in putting that nationality upon a foundation so broad, and deep, and sure, that it never again can be imperiled or impaired. The signs, we think, are

many and unmistakeable which point to these results. It may take a long time to reach them; but, I believe in my heart to-day, *they will be reached at last.* Many mistakes may be made by the National Congress and the National Executive, and many also by our Generals in the field; many reverses may be experienced by the national arms; many bitter and embarrassing controversies may occur among those who are honestly devoted to the preservation of the Union; many new and troublesome questions may arise; many partisans, for partisan purposes, may charge their opponents with treason; many wily, and selfish, and unprincipled leaders may spring to the surface, and cry, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there is salvation;" sectionalism, and ultraism, and many other detestable *isms* may do incalculable mischief before they breathe their last; much additional blood may be shed, and many additional tears may be shed, before the return of peace;—there may be changes, and disappointments, and delays, and perilous emergencies, of which as yet we have not dreamed; unexpected conflicts may arise at home, and threatening sounds may be heard from abroad; the hearts of men, here and there, good and bad, loyal and disloyal, may be very busy devising their ways; and some of their devices may be very strange, and some very absurd, and some very wicked:—but the comforting assurance is this, *The Lord will direct their steps:* He will determine the issues; and it is our confident hope and belief to-day, that *He will determine them in favor of the nation—in favor of its unity and life, its security and strength, its integrity and glory.*

We have never believed, nor do we ever expect to believe, that two separate and independent confederacies can exist in peace between the Northern Lakes and the Southern Gulf, between the sources and the mouth of the Mississippi. God manifestly made the vast country lying between these boundaries to be one. Its configuration is such, its rivers and mountain ranges are such, its various and mighty interests are so connected, and intertwined, that it demands one supervision, one regulating energy, one benign, and wise, and pa-

ternal government. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." We believe this is a case, where, what He has joined together, *can not* be permanently put asunder. Our Southern brethren, for so I must still regard and denominate them, are, in the madness of offended pride and passion, struggling to achieve an impossibility; and, unless they are stronger than Omnipotence, however brave and enduring they may be, such an achievement is beyond their ability. O that they could see this; that they could see it without delay;—then we might hope for a speedy and a permanent peace. But, whether they see it soon or not, and whether any of us live to see the end of the war or not, the final result must be, that the country will come back to its normal condition,—a condition of unity, covered by a single flag, and that flag none other than the star-spangled banner,—

"O long *may* it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

And when, as the issue of our present struggle, that grand consummation is attained, as attained it will be, and the nation springs up from its depression, girded with new strength, covered with new glory, and re-established upon a foundation of liberty and righteousness which can not be moved, O then, what a new, and impressive, and most memorable illustration will be given to the world of the truth asserted in our text, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." Man *pro*poses: God *dis*poses. Man pursues his ambitious schemes with ardor, and boasts that his success is sure: but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. Man raises a traitorous hand against his country: God so directs the blow, and the repelling forces, and all the ensuing and protracted conflict, that, in the end, the country is saved, and more than saved: it is elevated, and purified, and prepared, as never before, for a blessed mission and a splendid destiny. Our faith as to the certainty of this issue, rests, not in the wisdom of man, not on the policy or the prospective triumph of any political party, but

on the power of God, and on the tokens of His favor to the nation as we see them in all its past history, and in the recent events, successes, and triumphs, which are evoking our thanks and our praises to-day. "The Lord *hath* done great things for us: whereof we are glad." Our hope is that He will *continue* to do great things for us. Let us see His hand, and acknowledge His goodness, in every event which favors the national cause, and promises the restoration of the Union and of peace: and let us not forget or neglect to praise Him. And, while we praise Him, let us also approach Him as suppliants, committing to Him all our imperiled interests, and all our brave and patriotic soldiers on the land and on the sea, and all who are sick, or wounded, or suffering, or bereaved, or drawing nigh unto death, and all who stand in positions of influence and responsibility:—every interest, and every anxiety, and every burden that presses upon our grateful, yet solicitous, hearts to-day, let us cast it on the Lord, and He will sustain us. In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let us make known our requests unto Him, and then we may confidently hope for the *continuance* of His favor till these calamities be overpast. God is our refuge and strength. To Him we must perpetually make our appeal for help and *complete* deliverance. May He bring our every heart to-day into warm and perfect sympathy with the heart and prayer of the Psalmist:—"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning:"—and while we thus pray and wait for the salvation of God, let us also join, with all our hearts, in the prayer suggested to us by our honored Chief Magistrate, that, God, by his Holy Spirit, "will lead the whole nation, through the paths of repentance

and submission to the Divine will, back to the perfect enjoyment of union and fraternal peace." Hasten that blessed consummation, thou God of providence and grace. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks forever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations. Amen, and Amen.

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